PRIORITY UPDATE:
Newark, NJ Drinking Water Quality Issue (Stage 2 Disinfection Byproduct Violations) (11/1/18)

The following is a quick update to our previous submission to the Administrator highlighting significant lead exceedances in the City of Newark, New Jersey.

In that submission we highlighted the sensitivities and actions taken by EPA in concert with our state partners (NJDEP and NJDOH) to provide close support to the City.

- Region 2 has been made aware that elevated levels of haloacetic acids, or "HAA5," have been identified in Newark, NJ's drinking water. The information is based on sampling from the quarter ending on September 30, 2018. EPA's MCL for HAA5 is 60 ppb; some of the Newark testing sites reportedly average as high as 81 ppb. **These exceedances are currently being investigated by the media.**

- HAA5 are regulated by the Stage 2 Disinfection Byproducts rules (DBPR) under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). Long term consumption of drinking water with elevated HAA5 levels is associated with increased cancer and other health risks.

- The identification of elevated HAA5 levels is in addition to the recent announcement of elevated lead levels in some Newark residences, due to corrosion control that has become ineffective. Newark is distributing filters to tens of thousands of residents to address this concern.

- The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) reached out to EPA Region 2 to discuss their response to address this issue. NJDEP will be issuing the Newark Water Department a violation letter. EPA Region 2 will continue to work with the NJDEP on this issue.

Background

The Newark Water Department is a public water system serving over 270,000 people. The system has had compliance issues with the DBPR in the past. In 2017, the Newark Water Department had exceedances of the lead action level, and is currently working to revise its corrosion control treatment pursuant to an Administrative Consent Order with NJDEP. Treatment modifications will need to enable simultaneous compliance with both the DBPR maximum contaminant levels and the Lead and Copper Rule (LCR).

The City of Newark distributed filters to thousands of homes in Newark with lead service lines, following sampling in two homes with lead service lines that showed lead levels at approximately 148 and 400 ppb (the lead action level is 15 ppb). There are nearly 18,000 known lead service lines in the City of Newark; another 5,600 lines are unknown. In Newark, lead service lines are owned by homeowners, not the Newark Water Department, therefore they are not subject to the 7% lead service line replacement required by the Lead and Copper Rule. However, the Newark Water Department has initiated a 10-year lead service line replacement program which plans to replace approximately 1,600 lead service lines a year using Drinking Water State Revolving Fund monies.

NJDEP has primacy for the drinking water program and is the lead on working with Newark. EPA is closely engaged with NJDEP, both to monitor the situation in Newark and to provide assistance as needed, and will work with NJDEP, the Mayor of Newark, and other federal and state agencies as appropriate, to identify short- and long-term strategies to provide protection to the community.

We are now working to secure a high-level meeting to discuss the several Newark drinking water issues; the meeting would include the Mayor, senior officials from the state (including NJDEP, NJDOH and the Governor's office), and senior EPA Region 2 leadership.